

WORLD LITERATURE INDIA  
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*Interviews with Poets,  
Critical Thinkers and Scholars*

# 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY CRITICAL THOUGHT

A DIALOGUE WITH POST - MODERN VOICES

Volume 3

Dr JERNAIL SINGH ANAND



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Interviews by  
**Dr Jernail Singh Anand**



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# **21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY CRITICAL THOUGHT (Volume 3)**

## **A Dialogue with Post-modern Voices**

Interviews with Poets, Critical Thinkers and Scholars

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Life is a text written  
in an unknown language and literature  
is our endeavour trying to  
decipher it.

- Dr Jernail Singh Anand.





# INTRODUCTION

The thought of documenting 21st century critical thought was welcomed by the poets, academicians and scholars and in Volume 1 and 2, nearly 110 scholars were interviewed. The present volume has interviews by around 40 scholars from different backgrounds, ...who expressed their views on various aspects of literary creation. It aroused a lot of interest among the academia and more people offered to comment on the issues involved. As a result of which, this third volume has come to life with another half a century of scholarly views which have enriched the annals of literary creation.

No doubt, every book that is written becomes a part of the creative process of a particular period. However, through these three books, an attempt has been made to document the literary history of our times, for posterity. It is interesting to see how poets and scholars react to scholarly questions and their statements are a part of the critical lore of modern times.

While discussing theory, and the creative process, academia often refer to theoreticians like Deleuze, Homi Bhaba, Bakhtin etc. And this exercise goes on endlessly, taking off with T.S. Eliot's path breaking essay 'Tradition and Individual Talent'. The practitioners of literary theory are trapped in these concepts and refuse to go beyond them, or even consider there can be anything different from what has been oracled by a few.

These three volumes try to assert the voice of the creators and the theorists, as well as the practitioners of theory, in an out of the box manner, without referring to the theoretical systems, coming up with new critical values of assessment. I

have introduced the idea of biotext, which was evolved with the help of Dr Roghayeh Farsi from University of Neyshabur, Iran. Another new thought that I want my friends to try is about reading of poetry. I have designated it as Creation and Re-Creating of the Text, which means the reader constructs his own text. Biotext believes that every time we access the (I) text, we are a different reader and it yields different meanings. Going a bit further, another new thought that I want to share is: a reader recreates a text, but a critic 'interrogates' it, imparting a living identity to a poem, independent of the author. I wish my friends to come up with new ideas, with new innovative ways how literary text can be read, and how literature can become more fulfilling in these dreary times. I hope the collection of views in these three volumes will create a corpus of literary readings which will be helpful to the students and the teachers as well and once in the library, it will be a valuable asset for the future generations. I am deeply thankful to all the poets and scholars who have been interviewed, for giving their precious time and deep thought to the questionnaire, keeping in mind that some time in the coming centuries, some curious scholar might stumble upon them, in order to know how the poets and scholars of 21st century thought about literary creation.

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# Dipak Giri



Dipak Giri, author, editor, from Cooch Behar, a district town within the jurisdiction of state West Bengal, India, is an acclaimed name in the field of academic write-up. Though professionally he is a teacher in government higher secondary school (Katamari High School, Cooch Behar, West Bengal, India, PIN- 736157), he is passionately a hardcore researcher on Indian English Literature, Subaltern Studies, Queer Studies, Gender and Feminism. He currently holds the position of Editor-in-Chief in a non-profitable international journal “Creative Flight” (ISSN 2582-6158). His scholarly books and articles have been published in both national and international books and journals of repute. Till date he has edited fifteen books which have earned him global fame and recognition. Prior to joining as a school teacher, he worked in several colleges near his local town Cooch Behar as a Part Time Lecturer, a Guest Lecturer and a Visiting Lecturer. They are Cooch Behar College, T. P. M. Mahavidyalaya, Dewanhat College and Vivekananda College. Now he has been assigned with many academic and research activities. He is pursuing his Ph. D. from Raiganj University, Uttar Dinajpur, West Bengal, India. Besides he is acting his role of reviewer in some national and international journals of repute. He is also working as Academic Counsellor in Netaji Subhas Open University, Cooch Behar College Study Centre, Cooch Behar, West Bengal, India. One can visit him at <https://www.dipakgiri.com>.

## POETICS OF CREATION

*JSA: Poets are essentially human beings, and they have human aspirations too. What is the most common aspiration which poets share?*

**DG:** A poet is a human before being a poet and so, the presence of common human aspirations among poets is as obvious as we find it among other human beings. Abstractions like hope and aspiration work in the same way as it works on other human beings. Aspiration is a personal choice and may vary from person to person. Every poet has his own personal aspirations. Some aspire to become a name; some aspire for fame and power; whereas some aspire for wealth and prosperity. In spite of varied aspirations as found among poets, one common aspiration all poets share is the recognition of their poetry. By this

recognition poets aspire to reach their intended goal in the form of name, fame or wealth.

*JSA: What is the most common idea that poets are obsessed with?*

**DG:** The question is very interesting but contradictory since it is very difficult to establish one's view on what idea poets are generally obsessed with. As the style or form of poetry differs since some poems are descriptive, some narrative, some didactic and some are reflective, so the theme or the idea of poetry may also vary on poet's personal choice. Here nothing is said with fixity and finality. However, since poets are the true guardians of mankind, chances are there that they may have been obsessed with the idea of welfare of mankind. They may by and large be obsessed with the idea of common problems with which the larger sections of humanity have been suffering and may be the possible theme or idea of her or his poetry.

*JSA: Is the poet simply sharing his anguish with society, or working for solutions to human problems?*

**DG:** A poet is an idealist who wishes to invite changes in the social life of mankind as per her or his idealism which, in the form of message, she or he gives out in her or his poetry. Poetry is incomplete and may be said failure if it meets one part, i.e. problem and leaves another part, i.e. solution, the most crucial part, unmet. A poet should endeavour to suggest the possible solution along with expressing her or his anguish on problems existing in society. This solution may appear explicitly on the body of her or his poetry or may be implied but its presence must be felt by its readers, only then a poem may render its service to mankind.

*JSA: Poetry restores the mental and psychological balance of the poet. How can poetry help a society return to its balance?*

**DG:** Very interesting question, indeed! When the question of mental and psychological balance comes before one, it seems to one that both are synonymous. However, in their apparent semblance, they are subtly different but interlinked. By mental, we mean one's mind and thought related to it, whereas by psychological we mean not only mind and thoughts related to it but also the effects of mind and thoughts over other parts of our body. The harmony of both mental and psychological indicates a healthy mind within healthy body. This is

only possible when positive thoughts leave psychological impact all over our body. When we relate mental and psychological balance as regards poetry, it becomes an important issue. What a poet thinks mentally, relates it to psychologically and gives it concrete shape through poetry when both mental and psychological balance are perfectly maintained. This also helps society in return to restore its balance since poetry universalizes the individual and also individualises the universal. The poetic balance and restoration achieved through the mental and psychological balance becomes one with the poet in particular and society in general.

*JSA: Do you think a poet's job ends with writing a poem, getting it published, getting a few likes on fb, or journals?*

DG: No, a poet's job never ends with just publication of her or his creation. A poet lives with her or his poetic job and creative writing as long as she or he can and she or he lives through lines of her or his composition even after her or his death. Poet dies but her or his creation challenges death and mortality and survives long after her or his death. Poets who live merely on publicity in forms of getting a few likes on internet journals and virtual platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn etc., are not poets in true sense of the term. I think a poet should think bigger and nobler. Beyond thinking to get likes and compliments among few familiar faces on virtual platforms like social media, he ought to think the real world comprises of many known and unknown faces. The service of poet must be the service of mankind through poetry. This should be the lifelong motto of a poet beyond the virtual wall of internet and social media. A poet may use these virtual platforms to reach the masses but her or his job never ends with a few likes and words of appraisals as received on these platforms.

*JSA: Is the poet nowadays just a part of the hot stream of life? He believes in fame, wealth and position? And for this, he goes to any length?*

DG: True to many poets but not to all. Contrary to welfare of humanity which should be the primary concern of a poet, surprisingly and shockingly many poets are presently focusing more on personal interest. They are hankering after fame, money and prosperity and even taking risk of their self-dignity and honour. For this, people are losing their faith from poets, though all poets are not on the same track. Today when a poet says that she or he composes poetry only for self-

pleasure and for humanity's sake which ought to be the sole objective of a poem, it seems pretensive, as if she or he is a big liar and throwing dust into the eyes of many. Poets' interest for self-promotion and recognition related only with self-fame and self-prosperity devoid of service to mankind sounds odd and is never acceptable. To some extent if it remains within the bounds, it is permissible on the ground that poets are first human and then poets. However, if self-progress and prosperity becomes the only aim of a poet, it is shameful and undesirable at a poet's end.

*JSA: The old world is a dream now. And the new world has not yet taken shape. We are at present trekking between the two worlds. Certainly, no one can check our movement into the future. And, this future is manufactured by men with money, means and political power. What is poet's role in this scenario where man is born, not to his parents, but to a system?*

DG: Standing on a transitional world where an old world has departed and a new world is yet to start, a poet's role becomes more serious than ever. Since "the future of poetry is immense" (Arnold), a poet should mould the future of a new world yet to start through her or his poetic composition. Past is dead; present is reality and future is uncertain so poet should live in present, however, he should never approve the present as it is, rather he should suggest how the present should be. By suggesting 'how it should be' in place of 'as it is', a poet harnesses the future through her or his poetry. The place of power is at the root of every culture. Rousseau has rightly remarked, "Man is born free, and he is everywhere in chains". Human beings are system-bound from womb to tomb. They have to follow certain norms or standard defined by their culture. These norms are generally made for the goodness of few minorities who are positioned at the head but majorities of people are made victims of it. Free from discursive role of such power mechanism in whatever form they exist, a poet should deviate from it and wage war against it if he finds any injustice in it.

*JSA: Poets, like politicians, believe in the super-kill. And this super-kill is some international award. There is always a great movement among poets to make it to the Literature Academies, and meet the members for awards. Don't you think such awards are given only on the condition of 'good behaviour' in future? Many poets or intellectuals who were given Nobel Prizes were actually incarcerated by their governments for their philosophical leanings. Do you think a poet should follow his conscience, awards or no awards?*



**DG:** Award is another name of achievement which may come in both abstract and concrete forms. The greatest irony of mankind is that they believe more in seeing than 'not seeing'. When one is seen getting awarded with some award, she or he is well received by majorities, mattering not if she or he lacks anything. For this, poets are often found busy ironically more with award than her or his composition. In order to get fast recognition with their creative write ups, poets are mostly seen coming in league with those organizations that are associated with big awards. They forget their actual duty, i.e. the welfare of greater sections of humanity. They are often made so blind to award that they shake hands with corrupt power system and write pieces of poetry not for majorities but for handful minorities who are at the centre of power. A poet should save herself or himself from the clutches of power and write poetry for majorities. She or he must listen to conscience more than anything else. If she or he is true to her or his conscience working for the larger sections of humanity and feels joyful in this act and the more she or he serves, the more her or his joys grow stronger, then she or he is truly rewarded and this feeling of being rewarded in the service of humanity, though abstract, cannot be equaled with concrete awards which mostly come by politics of selection of one's personal choices and prejudices.

*JSA: Generally, nobody wants to come into conflict with the powers that be. So, poets write, but take care, not to cut the edges of reality. And in several countries, free speech is being suppressed. Poets raise voice, and compose poems praising the political bosses. Do you think such poetry can go far as savior of humanity? A poet who does not speak the truth for fear of reprisals, is he a poet?*

**DG:** Most people suffer from existential questions. Poets are also not free from this dilemma. However, only difference between the poets and common men is that the way common men can compromise with the system, poets cannot. However, this is not true to every poet. Some poets compromise with the system, whereas some go against it. For example, in the Victorian era when there was uproar and political upheaval on the question of Victorian compromise between science and faith, poets like Arnold and Carlyle boldly opposed it but poets like Coleridge and Browning supported it. In any circumstances, a poet should listen to her or his conscience and write accordingly. Such poetry, since written without any exterior pressure, is genuine and close to poet's heart and herein lies the joy of poetic creation. A poet should

remain an uncompromising soul to anything he finds wrong and should articulate it through her or his poetry becoming unaffected from any sort of doubt, fear or criticism.

*JSA: When will the volumes full of poetry lying dormant in the world, some in libraries, and some with the authors, speak up? Will this poetry ever come to life and walk the streets? Will these poets get up from their holy slumber and lead marches for the well being of the masses? Will poetry remain cut off from the main current of life?*

**DG:** Poetry is in existence ever since the very seed of human civilization was implanted. What to say of present books and libraries, even when there was no paper and writing materials, poetry was there. Also, in every literature, poetry made its first appearance and then came prose. The origin of poetry is as old as the origin of human life on this earth. It has always been in some or other form- orally or written. So, the non-existence of poetry from the mainstream of life is never possible. Poets along with her or his creations are never subject to death or mortality. In the celebration of his friend's beauty, Shakespeare is not wrong when he keeps faith on the immortality of his poetic creation: "So long as men can breath or eyes can see/ So long lives this..." (Sonnet 18). Then, again in Sonnet 63, "His beauty shall in these black lines be seen/ And they shall live, and he in them still green". In same tone, Spencer, in celebration of his beloved, shows faith on the immortality of poetry: "Let base things devise/To die in dust, but you shall live by fame:/My verse your vertues rare shall eternize, / And in the heavens write your glorious name." (Amoretti, Sonnet No. 75) Keats has more plainly stated when he says, "The poetry of earth is never dead" (On the Grasshopper and Cricket). So, thinking of poetry ever being cut off from the main current of life is absurd.